LEGION
SKIN DEEP

BRANDON SANDERSON
THE SUNDAY TIMES BESTSELLER
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‘Sanderson will be forever mentioned as one of the finest fantasy writers of this generation’

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‘Sanderson is clearly a master of large-scale stories, splendidly depicting worlds as well as strong female characters’

Booklist
Dedication

For Greg Creer,
Who was the first person other than myself
to ever read one of my books. Thank you
for the encouragement, my friend!
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Epilogue
Also by Brandon Sanderson from Gollancz:
PART 1
What’s her angle? Ivy asked, walking around the table with her arms folded. Today, she wore her blonde hair in a severe bun, which was stuck through with several dangerous-looking pins.

I tried, unsuccessfully, to ignore her.

‘Gold digger, perhaps?’ Tobias asked. Dark-skinned and stately, he had pulled a chair over to the table so he could sit beside me. He wore his usual relaxed suit with no tie, and fit in well with this room of crystalline lighting and piano music. ‘Many a woman has seen only Stephen’s wealth, and not his acumen.’

‘She’s the daughter of a real estate magnate,’ Ivy said with a dismissive wave. ‘She has wealth coming out of her nose.’ Ivy leaned down beside the table, inspecting my dinner companion. ‘A nose, by the way, which seems to have had as much work done on it as her chest.’

I forced out a smile, trying to keep my attention on my dinner companion. I was used to Ivy and Tobias by now. I relied upon them.

But it can be damn hard to enjoy a date when your hallucinations are along.

‘So …’ said Sylvia, my date. ‘Malcom tells me you’re some kind of detective?’ She gave me a timid smile. Resplendent in diamonds and a tight black dress, Sylvia was an acquaintance of a mutual friend who worried about me far too much. I wondered how much research Sylvia had done on me before agreeing to the blind date.

‘A detective?’ I said. ‘Yes, I suppose you could say that.’

‘I just did!’ Sylvia replied with a chittering laugh.

Ivy rolled her eyes, refusing the seat Tobias pulled over for her.

‘Though honestly,’ I said to Sylvia, ‘the word “detective” probably gives you the wrong idea. I just help people with very specialized problems.’

‘Like Batman!’ Sylvia said.

Tobias spat out his lemonade in a spray before him. It spotted the tablecloth, though Sylvia – of course – couldn’t see it.

‘Not … really like that,’ I said.

‘I was just being silly,’ Sylvia said, taking another drink of her wine. She’d had a lot of that for a meal that she’d only just begun. ‘What kind of problems do you solve? Like, computer problems? Security problems? Logic problems?’

‘Yes. All three of those, and then some.’

‘That … doesn’t sound very specialized to me,’ Sylvia said.

She had a point. ‘It’s difficult to explain. I’m a specialist, just in lots of areas.’

‘Like what?’
‘Anything. Depends on the problem.’
‘She’s hiding things,’ Ivy said, arms still folded. ‘I’m telling you, Steve. She’s got an angle.’
‘Everyone does,’ I replied.
‘What?’ Sylvia asked, frowning as a server with a cloth over her arm made our salad plates vanish.
‘Nothing,’ I said.
Sylvia shifted in her chair, then took another drink. ‘You were talking to them, weren’t you?’
‘So you have read up on me.’
‘A girl has to be careful, you know. There are some real psychos in the world.’
‘I assure you,’ I said. ‘It’s all under control. I see things, but I’m completely aware of what is real and what is not.’
‘Be careful, Stephen,’ Tobias said from my side. ‘This is dangerous territory for a first date. Perhaps a discussion of the architecture instead?’
I realized I’d been tapping my fork against my bread plate, and stopped.
‘This building is a Renton McKay design,’ Tobias continued in his calm, reassuring way. ‘Note the open nature of the room, with the movable fixtures, and geometric designs in ascending patterns. They can rebuild the interior every year or so, creating a restaurant that is half eatery, half art installation.’
‘My psychology really isn’t that interesting,’ I said. ‘Not like this building. Did you know that it was built by Renton McKay? He –’
‘So you see things,’ Sylvia interrupted. ‘Like visions?’
I sighed. ‘Nothing so grand. I see people who aren’t there.’
‘Like that guy,’ she said. ‘In that movie.’
‘Sure. Like that. Only he was crazy, and I’m not.’
‘Oh, yeah,’ Ivy said. ‘What a great way to put her at ease. Explain in depth how not crazy you are.’
‘Aren’t you supposed to be a therapist?’ I snapped back at her. ‘Less sarcasm would be delightful.’
That was a tall order for Ivy. Sarcasm was kind of her native tongue, though she was fluent in ‘stern disappointment’ and ‘light condescension’ as well. She was also a good friend. Well, imaginary friend.
She just had a thing about me and women. Ever since Sandra abandoned us, at least.
Sylvia regarded me with a stiff posture, and only then did I realize I’d spoken out loud to Ivy. As Sylvia noticed me looking at her, she plastered on a smile as fake as red dye #6. Inside, I winced. She was quite attractive, despite what Ivy claimed – and no matter how crowded my life had become, it also got terribly lonely.
‘So …’ Sylvia said, then trailed off. Entrées arrived. She had chic lettuce wraps. I’d chosen a safe-sounding chicken dish. ‘So, uh … You were speaking to one of them, just now? An imaginary person?’ She obviously considered it polite to ask. Perhaps the proper lady’s book of etiquette had a chapter on how to make small talk about a man’s
psychological disabilities.

‘Yes,’ I said. ‘That was one of them. Ivy.’

‘A … lady?’

‘A woman,’ I said. ‘She’s only occasionally a lady.’

Ivy snorted. ‘Your maturity is stunning, Steve.’

‘How many of your personalities are female?’ Sylvia asked. She hadn’t touched her food yet.

‘They aren’t personalities,’ I said. ‘They’re separate from me. I don’t have dissociative identity disorder. If anything, I’m schizophrenic.’

That is a subject of some debate among psychologists. Despite my hallucinations, I don’t fit the profile for schizophrenia. I don’t fit any of the profiles. But why should that matter? I get along just fine. Mostly.

I smiled at Sylvia, who still hadn’t started her food. ‘It’s not a big deal. My aspects are probably just an effect of a lonely childhood, spent mostly by myself.’

‘Good,’ Tobias said. ‘Now transition the conversation away from your eccentricities and start talking about her.’

‘Yes,’ Ivy said. ‘Find out what she’s hiding.’

‘Do you have siblings?’ I asked.

Sylvia hesitated, then finally picked up her silverware. Never had I been so happy to see a fork move. ‘Two sisters,’ she said, ‘both older. Maria is a consultant for a marketing firm. Georgia lives in the Cayman Islands. She’s an attorney …’

I relaxed as she continued. Tobias raised his glass of lemonade to me in congratulations. Disaster avoided.

‘You’re going to have to talk about it with her eventually,’ Ivy said. ‘We aren’t exactly something she can ignore.’

‘Yes,’ I said softly. ‘But for now, I’ll settle for surviving the first date.’

‘What was that?’ Sylvia looked at us, hesitating in her narrative.

‘Nothing,’ I said.

‘She was speaking about her father,’ Tobias said. ‘A banker. Retired.’

‘How long was he in banking?’ I asked, glad that one of us had been paying attention.

‘Forty-eight years! We kept saying he didn’t need to continue on …’

I smiled and began cutting my chicken as she talked.

‘Perimeter clear,’ a voice said from behind me.

I started, looking over my shoulder. J.C. stood there, wearing a busboy’s uniform and carrying a tray of dirty dishes. Lean, tough, and square-jawed, J.C. is a coldblooded killer. Or so he claims. I think it means he likes to murder amphibians.

He was a hallucination, of course. J.C., the plates he was carrying, the handgun he had holstered inconspicuously under his white server’s jacket … all hallucinations. Despite that, he’d saved my life several times.

That didn’t mean I was pleased to see him.

‘What are you doing here?’ I hissed.
'Watching out for assassins,' J.C. said. 'I'm on a date!' 'Which means you'll be distracted,' J.C. said. 'Perfect time for an assassination.' 'I told you to stay home!' 'Yeah, I know. The assassins would have heard that too. That's why I had to come.' He nudged me with an elbow. I felt it. He might be imaginary, but he felt perfectly real to me. 'She's a looker, Skinny. Nice work!' 'Half of her is plastic,' Ivy said dryly. 'Same goes for my car,' J.C. said. 'It still looks nice.' He grinned at Ivy, then leaned down to me. 'I don't suppose you could ...' He nodded toward Ivy, then raised his hands to his chest, making a cupping motion. 'J.C.,' Ivy said flatly. 'Did you just try to get Steve to imagine me with a larger chest?' J.C. shrugged. 'You,' she said, 'are the most loathsome non-being on the planet. Really. You should feel proud. Nobody has imagined anything more slimy, ever.' The two of them had an off-again on-again relationship. Apparently, 'off-again' had started when I wasn't looking. I really had no idea what to make of it – this was the first time two of my aspects had become romantically entangled. Curiously, J.C. had been completely unable to say the words about me imagining Ivy with a different body shape. He didn't like to confront the fact that he was a hallucination. It made him uncomfortable. J.C. continued looking the room over. Despite his obvious hangups, he was keen-eyed and very good with security. He'd notice things I would not, so perhaps it was good he'd decided to join us. 'What?' I asked him. 'Is there something wrong?' 'He's just paranoid,' Ivy said. 'Remember when he thought the postman was a terrorist?' J.C. stopped scanning, his attention focusing sharply on a woman sitting three tables over. Dark-skinned and wearing a nice pantsuit, she turned toward her window as soon as I noticed her. That window reflected back our way, and it was dark outside. She could still be watching. 'I'll check it out,' J.C. said, moving away from our table. 'Stephen ...' Tobias said. I glanced back at our table and found Sylvia staring at me again, her fork held loosely as if forgotten, her eyes wide. I forced myself to chuckle. 'Sorry! Got distracted by something.' 'By what?' 'Nothing. You were saying something about your mother –' 'What distracted you?' 'An aspect,' I said, reluctant. 'A hallucination, you mean.' 'Yes. I left him home. He came on his own.'
Sylvia stared intently at her food. ‘That’s interesting. Tell me more.’

Being polite again. I leaned forward. ‘It’s not what you think, Sylvia. My aspects are just pieces of me, receptacles for my knowledge. Like … memories that get up and walk around.’

‘She’s not buying it,’ Ivy noted. ‘Breathing quickly. Fingers tense … Steve, she knows more about you than you think. She’s not acting shocked, but instead like she’s been set up on a date with Jack the Ripper and is trying to keep her cool.’

I nodded at the information. ‘It’s nothing to worry about.’ Had I said that already? ‘Each of my aspects help me in some way. Ivy is a psychologist. Tobias is a historian. They –’

‘What about the one that just arrived?’ Sylvia asked, looking up and meeting my eyes. ‘The one who came when you weren’t expecting?’

‘Lie,’ Tobias said.

‘Lie,’ Ivy said. ‘Tell her he’s a ballet dancer or something.’

‘J.C.,’ I said instead, ‘is ex-Navy SEAL. He helps me with that sort of thing.’

‘That sort of thing?’

‘Security situations. Covert operations. Any time I might be in danger.’

‘Does he tell you to kill people?’

‘It’s not like that. Okay, well, it is kind of like that. But he’s usually joking.’

Ivy groaned.

Sylvia stood up. ‘Excuse me. I need the restroom.’

‘Of course.’

Sylvia took her purse and shawl and left.

‘Not coming back?’ I asked Ivy.

‘Are you kidding? You just told her that an invisible man who tells you to kill people just showed up when you didn’t want him to.’

‘Not one of our smoothest interactions,’ Tobias agreed.

Ivy sighed and sat down in Sylvia’s seat. ‘Better than last time, at least. She lasted … what? Half an hour?’

‘Twenty minutes,’ Tobias said, glancing at the restaurant’s grandfather clock.

‘We’re going to need to get over this,’ I whispered. ‘We can’t keep going to pieces every time romance is potentially involved.’

‘You didn’t need to say what you did about J.C.,’ Ivy said. ‘You could have made something up. Instead, you told her the truth. The frightening, embarrassing, J.C.-filled truth.’

I picked up my drink. Lemonade in a fancy wine glass. I turned it about. ‘My life is fake, Ivy. Fake friends. Fake conversations. Often, on Wilson’s day off, I don’t speak to a single real person. I guess I don’t want to start a relationship with lies.’

The three of us sat in silence until J.C. came jogging back, dancing to the side of a real server as they passed one another.

‘What?’ he asked, glancing at Ivy. ‘You chased the chick off already?’

I raised my glass to him.
‘Don’t be too hard on yourself, Stephen,’ Tobias said, resting his hand on my shoulder. ‘Sandra is a difficult woman to forget, but the scars will eventually heal.’

‘Scars don’t heal, Tobias,’ I said. ‘That’s kind of the definition of the word *scar.*’ I turned my glass around, looking at the light on the ice.

‘Yeah, great, whatever,’ J.C. said. ‘Emotions and metaphors and stuff. Look, we’ve got a problem.’

I looked at him.

‘The woman we saw earlier?’ J.C. said, pointing. ‘She –’ He cut off. The woman’s seat was empty, her meal left half-eaten.

‘Time to go?’ I asked.

‘Yeah,’ J.C. said. ‘*Now.*’
Zen Rigby,’ J.C. said as we rushed from the restaurant. ‘Private security – and, in this case, those are fancy words for “killer on retainer”. She has a list of suspected hits as long as your psychological profile, Skinny. No proof. She’s good.’

‘Wait,’ Ivy said from my other side. ‘You’re saying that an assassin really did show up at dinner?’

‘Apparently,’ I replied. J.C. could only know what I did, so if he was saying these things, they were dredged from deep in my memory. I periodically looked over lists of operatives, spies, and professional assassins for missions I did.

‘Great,’ Ivy said, not looking at J.C. ‘He’s going to be insufferable to live with now.’

On the way out of the restaurant, at J.C.’s prompting, I looked at the reservation list. That simple glance dumped the information there into my mind, and gave the aspects access to it.

‘Carol Westminster,’ J.C. said, picking a name off the list. ‘She’s used that alias before. Zen is sure for sure.’

We stopped at the valet stand outside, the rainy evening making cars swish as they drove past on the wet road. The weather dampened the city’s normal pungency – so instead of unwashed hobo, it smelled like recently washed hobo. A man asked for our valet ticket, but I ignored him, texting Wilson to bring our car.

‘You said she’s on retainer, J.C.,’ I said as I texted. ‘Whom does she work for?’

‘Not sure,’ J.C. said. ‘Last I heard, she was looking for a new home. Zen isn’t one of those “hire for a random hit” assassins. Companies bring her on and keep her long-term, use her to clean up messes, fix problems in legally ambiguous ways.’

I knew all of this, deep down, but J.C. had to tell it to me. I’m not crazy, I’m compartmentalized. Unfortunately, my aspects ... well, they tend to be a little unhinged. Tobias stood to the side, muttering that Stan – the voice he hears sometimes – hadn’t warned him of the rain. Ivy pointedly did not look at the series of small wormholes in the post nearby. Had it always been this bad?

‘It could just be a coincidence,’ Tobias said to me, shaking his head and turning away from his inspection of the sky. ‘Assassins go out for dinner like everyone else.’

‘I suppose,’ J.C. said. ‘If it is a coincidence, though, I’m gonna be annoyed.’

‘Looking forward to shooting someone tonight?’ Ivy asked.

‘Well, yeah, obviously. But that’s not it. I hate coincidences. Life is much simpler when you can just assume that everyone is trying to kill you.’

Wilson texted back. Old friend called. Wanted to speak with you. He is in car. Okay?
I texted back. *Who?*  
*Yol Chay.*  
*A few minutes out,* Wilson texted to me.  
‘Yo,’ J.C. said, pointing. ‘Scope it.’  
Nearby, Sylvia was getting into a car with a man in a suit. Glen, reporter for the *Mag.* He shut the door for Sylvia, glanced at me and shrugged, tipping his antiquated fedora before climbing in the other side of the car.  
‘I knew she had an angle!’ Ivy aid. ‘It was a setup! I’ll bet she was recording the entire date.’  
I groaned. The *Mag* was a tabloid of the worst kind – meaning that it published enough truths mixed with its fabrications that people kind of trusted it. For most of my life I’d avoided mainstream media attention, but recently the papers and news websites had latched on to me.  
J.C. shook his head in annoyance, then jogged off to scout the perimeter as we waited for the car.  
‘I did warn you something was up,’ Ivy said, arms folded as we stood beneath the canopy with the valets, rain pattering above.  
‘I know.’  
‘You’re normally more suspicious than this. I’m worried that you are developing a blind spot for women.’  
‘Noted.’  
‘And J.C. is disobeying you again. Coming on his own when you pointedly left him at home? We haven’t ever discussed what happened in Israel.’  
‘We solved the case. That’s all that happened.’  
‘J.C. shot your gun, Steve. He – an aspect – shot real people.’  
‘He moved my arm,’ I said. ‘I did the shooting.’  
‘That’s a blurring between us that has never happened before.’ She met my eyes. ‘You’re trying to find Sandra again; I think you purposely sabotaged this date to have an excuse to avoid future ones.’  
‘You’re jumping to conclusions.’  
‘I’d better be,’ Ivy said. ‘We had an equilibrium, Steve. Things were working. I don’t want to start worrying about aspects vanishing again.’  
My limo finally pulled up, Wilson – my butler – driving. It was late evening, and the regular driver only worked a normal eight-hour shift.  
‘Who’s that in the back?’ J.C. said, jogging up and trying to get a clear view through the tinted windows.  
‘Yol Chay,’ I said.  
‘Huh,’ J.C. said, rubbing his chin.  
‘Think he’s involved?’ I asked.  
‘I’d bet your life on it.’  
Delightful. Well, a meeting with Yol was always interesting, if nothing else. The
restaurant valet pulled open the door for me. I moved to step in, but J.C. put his hand on my chest and stopped me, unholstering his sidearm and peering in.

I glanced at Ivy and rolled my eyes, but she wasn’t looking at me. Instead, she watched J.C., smiling fondly. What was up with those two?

J.C. stood back and nodded, removing his hand from my chest. Yol Chay lounged inside my limo. He wore a pure white suit, a silver bow tie, and a polished set of black-and-white oxford shoes. He topped it all with sunglasses that had diamonds studding the rims – an extremely odd outfit for a fifty-year-old Korean businessman. For Yol, though, this was actually reserved.

‘Steve!’ he said, holding out a fist to be bumped and speaking with a moderately thick Korean accent. He said the name Stee-uh. ‘How are you, you crazy dog?’

‘Dumped,’ I said, letting my aspects climb in first, so the valet didn’t close the door on them. ‘The date didn’t even last an hour.’

‘What? What is wrong with the women these days?’

‘I don’t know,’ I said, climbing in and sitting down as my aspects arranged themselves. ‘I guess they want a guy who doesn’t remind them of a serial killer.’

‘Boring,’ Yol said. ‘Who wouldn’t want to date you? You’re a steal! One body, forty people. Infinite variety.’

He didn’t quite understand how my aspects worked, but I forgave him that. I wasn’t always sure how they worked.

I let Yol serve me a cup of lemonade. Helping him with his problem a few years back had been some of the most fun, and least stress, I’d ever encountered on a project. Even if it bad forced me to learn to play the saxophone.

‘How many today?’ Yol asked, nodding to the rest of the limo.

‘Only three.’

‘Is the spook here?’

‘I’m not CIA,’ J.C. said. ‘I’m Special Forces, you twit.’

‘Is he annoyed to see me?’ Yol asked, grinning behind his garish sunglasses.

‘You could say that,’ I replied.

Yol’s grin deepened, then he took out his phone and tapped a few buttons. ‘J.C., I just donated ten grand in your name to the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence. I just thought you’d like to know.’

J.C. growled. Like, literally growled.

I leaned back, inspecting Yol as the limo drove us. Another followed behind, filled with Yol’s people. Yol had given Wilson instructions, apparently, as this wasn’t the way home. ‘You play along with my aspects, Yol,’ I said. ‘Most others don’t. Why is that?’

‘It’s not play to you, is it?’ he asked, lounging.

‘No.’

‘Then it isn’t to me either.’ His phone chirped the sound of some bird.

‘That’s actually the call of an eagle,’ Tobias said. ‘Most people are surprised to hear
how they really sound, as the American media uses the call of the red-tailed hawk when showing an eagle. They don’t think the eagle sounds regal enough. And so we lie to ourselves about the very identity of our national icon …’

And Yol used this as his ringtone. Interesting. The man answered the phone and began speaking in Korean.

‘Do we have to deal with this joker?’ J.C. said.

‘I like him,’ Ivy said, sitting beside Yol. ‘Besides, you yourself said he was probably involved with that assassin.’

‘Yeah, well,’ J.C. said. ‘We could get the truth out of him. Use the old five-point persuasion method.’ He made a fist and pounded it into his other hand.

‘You’re terrible,’ Ivy said.

‘What? He’s so weird, he’d probably get off on it.’

Yol hung up his phone.

‘Any problems?’ I asked.

‘News of my latest album.’

‘Good news?’

Yol shrugged. He had released five music albums. All had flopped spectacularly. When you were worth 1.2 billion from a life of keen commodities investing, a little thing like poor sales on your rap albums was not going to stop you from making more.

‘So …’ Yol said. ‘I have an issue I might need help with.’

‘Finally!’ J.C. said. ‘This had better not involve trying to make people listen to that awful music of his.’ He paused. ‘Actually, if we need a new form of torture …’

‘Does this job involve a woman named Zen?’ I asked.

‘Who?’ Yol frowned.

‘Professional assassin,’ I replied. ‘She was watching me at dinner.’

‘Could be wanting a date,’ Yol said cheerfully.

I raised an eyebrow.

‘Our problem,’ Yol said, ‘might involve some danger, and our rivals are not above hiring such … individuals. She’s not working for me though, I promise you that.’

‘This job,’ I said. ‘Is it interesting?’

Yol grinned. ‘I need you to recover a corpse.’

‘Oooo …’ J.C. said.

‘Hardly worth our time,’ Tobias said.

‘There’s more,’ Ivy said, studying Yol’s expression.

‘What’s the hitch?’ I asked Yol.

‘It’s not the corpse that is important,’ Yol said, leaning in. ‘It’s what the corpse knows.’
Innovation Information Incorporated,’ J.C. said, reading the sign outside the business
campus as we pulled through the guarded gate. ‘Even I can tell that’s a stupid name.’
He hesitated a moment. ‘It is a stupid name, right?’
‘The name is a little obvious,’ I replied.
‘Founded by engineers,’ Yol said, ‘run by engineers, and – unfortunately – named by
engineers. They’re waiting for us inside. Note, Steve, that what I’m asking you to do
goes beyond friendship. Deal with this for me, and our debt will be settled, and then
some.’
‘If a hit woman is really involved, Yol,’ I said reluctantly, ‘that’s not going to be
enough. I’m not going to risk my life for a favor.’
‘What about wealth?’
‘I’m already rich,’ I said.
‘Not riches, wealth. Complete financial independence.’
That gave me pause. It was true; I had money. But my delusions required a lot of
space and investment. Many rooms in my mansion, multiple seats on the plane each
time I fly, fleets of cars and drivers whenever I wanted to go somewhere for an
extended time. Perhaps I could have bought a smaller house and forced my aspects to
live in the basement or shacks on the lawn. The problem was that when they were
unhappy – when the illusion of it started to break down – things got … bad for me.
I was finally dealing with this thing. Whatever twisted psychology made me tick, I
was far more stable now than I had been at the start. I wanted to keep it that way.
‘Are you in personal danger?’ I asked him.
‘I don’t know,’ Yol said. ‘I might be.’ He handed me an envelope.
‘Money?’ I asked.
‘Shares in I3,’ Yol said. ‘I purchased the company six months ago. The things this
company is working on are revolutionary. That envelope gives you a ten percent stake.
I’ve already filed the paperwork. It’s yours, whether you take the job or not. A
consultation fee.’
I fingered the envelope. ‘If I don’t solve your problem, this will be worthless, eh?’
Yol grinned. ‘You got it. But if you do solve it, that envelope could be worth tens of
millions. Maybe hundreds of millions.’
‘Damn,’ J.C. said.
‘Language,’ Ivy said, punching him in the shoulder. At this rate, those two were
either heading for a full-blown screaming match or a makeout session. I could never
tell.
I looked at Tobias, who sat across from me in the limo. He leaned forward, clasping his hands before him, looking me in the eye. ‘We could do a lot with that money,’ he said. ‘We might have the resources, finally, to track her down.’

Sandra knew things about me, things about how I thought. She understood aspects. Hell, she’d taught me how they work. She’d captivated me.

And then she’d gone. In an instant.

‘The camera,’ I said.

‘The camera doesn’t work,’ Tobias said. ‘Arnaud said he could be years away from figuring it out.’

I fingered the envelope.

‘She’s actively blocking your efforts to find her, Stephen,’ Tobias said. ‘You can’t deny that. Sandra doesn’t want to be found. To get to her, we’ll need resources. Freedom to ignore cases for a while, money to overcome roadblocks.’

I glanced at Ivy, who shook her head. She and Tobias disagreed on what we should be doing in regard to Sandra – but she’d had her say earlier.

I looked back at Yol. ‘I assume that I have to agree before I can know about the technology you people are involved in?’

Yol spread his hands. ‘I trust you, Steve. That money is yours. Go in. Hear them out. That’s all I’m asking. You can say yes or no afterward.’

‘All right,’ I said, pocketing the envelope. ‘Let me hear what your people have to say.’